

**Testimony of Fallyn Fonville-Smith
Family School Connection Program
Madonna Place, Inc.
240 Main Street
Norwich, CT 06360**

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Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget**

My name is Fallyn Fonville-Smith and I am a Parent Educator with the Family School Connection Program, which is run by Madonna Place Inc. in Norwich CT. I want to thank each of our esteemed legislators and friends for allowing me to speaking briefly in support of continued funding for this worthwhile program.

I have rewritten my words for today several times to ensure that I was sharing the most useful information and to ensure that our program continues. I thought about sharing information about highlighting our evidence and strength-based curriculum. Or perhaps highlighting statistics like the fact that economists studying home visiting programs have found that they return up to \$5.70 for every dollar invested. I was not, however, satisfied and after a few working drafts, I decided to speak to my adopted uncle, Reverend Wade Hyslop, a former state representative and deputy speaker of the house. I asked Uncle Rev, as I call him, what he would want to hear if he was hearing testimony today. His words were brief... Tell the stories of your clients who cannot be there and tell the story of why you chose to work there over other possible employment opportunities. I hope to do just that in the brief time remaining.

As you know, our programs provide comprehensive home support services for families who have children who are frequently absent, truant, have academic or behavioral challenges, or who for one reason or another come to school unprepared. We also provide services to ensure proper engagement and access to resources for these parents. But who are our clients and what does this assistance that I have mentioned look like?

- Well consider a family with three boys who is a part of my caseload. They are hardworking like most families in our areas, but they have a father who after some time confided in me that he was dyslexic and had trouble reading. He shared that his lack of confidence in his reading ability meant that his wife had to help their 3 boys with their homework and also had to complete all of the school-related forms and paperwork. After joining our program we connected him with resources to help him with his reading challenges and with his learning difference. The result? After a month, the mother joyfully reported that her husband was reading to his boys before bed. After another

month he was helping his boys with their homework all of which has strengthen academic performance and this family's engagement with the school. More importantly the bonds in this family have been immeasurably strengthened.

Research outcomes for the Family School Connection demonstrate reduced chances of child abuse for our high risk families. Family School Connection also fills in the gap of helping schools with limited resources to aid in reducing behavior issues as well as attendance issues.

I could go on and on about the families who I have seen strengthened because of their desire to do better and that have done better because our program is there, but for the sake of time I will end there and will close with these heartfelt words.

Ladies and Gentleman of this appropriations committee, I urge you to continue funding for the Family School Connection. These program are creating opportunities for success not only for parents, but they are breaking negative family cycles and building positive relationships between people and the schools that this state funds. Indeed, if this funding ceases, the children, who everyone agrees are our future, are the ones that will suffer. I implore you to continue the funding to these programs...